

TRAFFICKING AN "EGREGIOUS" FORM OF SLAVERY, USAID OFFICIAL SAYS

By
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WASHINGTON, AUGUST 23 -- The estimated \$8 billion a year generated worldwide by the trafficking of humans are the tainted profits of "a most egregious form of slavery," according to Kent Hill, a senior health official with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

Human trafficking is the world's third most lucrative illegal commercial activity, following trade in narcotics and weapons, added Lynn Sauls, another USAID official, who with Hill, addressed an August 10 meeting in Washington devoted to raising awareness of the transnational exploitative trafficking of an estimated 600,000 to 800,000 women, men and children every year.

Hill said the problem of human trafficking is "one of the most important issues of our time."

He said trafficking, what he called the "sale of human dignity," would be "inconceivable without demand" for prostitutes and cheap labor from people in rich countries.

Hill countered arguments that prostitution in developed countries and the cross-border industry known as "sex tourism" would decrease if governments legalized these activities.

There is "overwhelming evidence," he said, that victims of trafficking, many of whom are deceived by traffickers to think they are going to another country for a legitimate paying job and "a new life," would rather be involved in other activities that would lift them out of poverty.

Since 2001, the United States has supported anti-trafficking activities in more than 70 countries with programs tailored to the conditions of individual countries, according to a USAID report, Trafficking in Persons: USAID's Response, released in March.

In 2005, the United States provided more than \$21.3 million to support anti-trafficking activities, such as raising public awareness about the problem and helping victims reintegrate into society and find jobs.

Of that amount, countries in Europe and Eurasia received \$7.86 million; Latin American and Caribbean countries received \$7.58 million; countries in Asia and the Near East received \$3.4 million; and African countries received \$2.2 million, the report says.

USAID anti-trafficking initiatives have led to "significant buy-in" from local governments, according to Sauls, who works in USAID's office that concentrates on improving the lives of women who live in developing countries. Some jurisdictions have signed agreements with the United States promising to help trafficked victims safely return to their home countries and receive occupational training.

The efforts include refugee assistance, support for girls' education, and activities aimed at reducing violence against women and promoting women's rights, according to a second USAID report outlining the agency's anti-trafficking strategy.

Some initiatives also involve men delivering anti-trafficking messages within their communities, Sauls said.

In addition, U.S. funding is supporting anti-trafficking training for law enforcement and judicial officials.

The commercial sex industry is an underlying cause of a significant segment of the world's human trafficking, but other victims often are sold into bondage as brick kiln and rice mill laborers, maids, child soldiers and camel-race jockeys, Sauls said.

In January, President Bush signed legislation reauthorizing funding for anti-trafficking efforts initiated in 2000. The bill is expected to provide \$361 million

over the next two years to combat human trafficking and protect victims. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/gi/Archive/2006/Jan/11-191763.html>).)

The U.S. State Department delivered a global survey of human trafficking in the annual Trafficking in Persons Report issued in June. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/gi/Archive/2006/Jun/05-20237.html>).)

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